



Northwest Intermountain Synod ELCA

Rev. Meggan Manlove, Bishop
Rev. Phil Misner, Asst. Bishop
Rev. Liv Larson Andrews, Dir. Evangelical Mission
Cathy Steiner, Executive Assistant

January 2024

“13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them...” (Luke 24)

Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome to annual meeting season! I hope that in addition to doing the important work of electing leaders and/or approving budgets, your congregation’s annual meeting is a time to celebrate the way the Holy Spirit is working through your congregation and the many ways God’s love is shared in your larger community, across the Northwest Intermountain (NWIM) Synod, and around the world. I am writing this letter in early January, after reading Christmas cards full of laments for Israel and Palestine, Ukraine, and so many other places where violence harms the innocent. But the letters also spoke of the deep hope that comes from trusting in the abundant love and life that comes from the Triune God we worship. I encourage you to rejoice in this hope during your meetings even as you pray for peace.

At the end of April, the NWIM Synod Assembly gathered under the theme Bega Kwa Bega (shoulder to shoulder). We use this Swahili phrase because Swahili has no word for *accompaniment*, the term the ELCA uses to describe companion synod relationships (like our relationship with the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese of Tanzania) and the many other relationships in our neighborhoods and communities. The scripture story at the heart of our understanding of accompaniment is the Road to Emmaus from Luke Chapter 24, which begins with Jesus walking shoulder to shoulder with two disciples who do not recognize him. The teaching document on accompaniment states, “We, and our acquaintances on the road, are all part of the body of Christ. We walk the Emmaus road every day and the people with whom we share the journey accompany us and we accompany them. The Emmaus road story helps to illuminate *Accompaniment, a theology of mission*. We see that mission is a journey, and that this journey, taken with many companions, shows us the unexpected and sometimes unrecognized Christ who walks with us. In this journey, we break bread together, we move toward Christ’s mission of reconciliation between us and God, between us and one another.”

Now, anything can become an idol, even a theology. I am not inviting us to worship at the altar of accompaniment, but I do find it a helpful theme and thread for our mission as a synod. Our rostered leaders leaned into accompaniment when we heard from Vance Blackfox at Bishop’s Fall Convocation. Accompaniment will be in the background during our three spring regional gatherings (Spokane Valley, Twin Falls, and Ellensburg) where we will talk about *Funding Forward* and stewardship. Most important, accompaniment is what each of our congregations and ministries do locally—you are accompanied by your neighbors, and you accompany them. Accompaniment is sometimes hard, other times joyful, and occasionally puzzling. Our synod staff also seeks to accompany you, whether in the call process, a new adventure, or a time of struggle. The English word synod combines two Greek words that literally mean *a way together*.

In the life of the church, the other place the word accompaniment arises is of course in worship, during which the instrumentalist accompanies the assembly in singing. This may not be shoulder to shoulder, but what joy we have when the instrument and assembly are in sync! All our accompaniment in the world is grounded in worship. We are both sent from worship to serve, and we return to be fed and nourished. Thank you, finally, for your faithful worship of a God whose love is boundless.

Bishop Meggan H Manlove